

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-07

LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00

INRE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 L-03 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 /071 W

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O 301643Z JAN 78

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9766

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 0708

PARIS FOR LABATT

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, PGOV, TS

SUBJ: UGTT VERSION OF GENERAL STRIKE AND AFTERMATH

REF: TUNIS 0680, TUNIS 0681

1. DISCUSSION YESTERDAY JAN 29 WITH THAMEUR ACHOUR, SON OF UGTT HEAD HABIB ACHOUR (NOW UNDER ARREST), REVEALED THE UNION LEADERSHIP'S VERSION OF THE CONTROVERSY NOW SWIRLING AROUND THURSDAY'S GENERAL STRIKE AND SUBSEQUENT WIDESPREAD CIVIL DISORDERS. THE YOUNGER ACHOUR STATED THAT "PSD MILITIA" HAD INSTIGATED MUCH OF THE VANDALISM AND RIOTING WHICH GREW OUT OF THE GENERAL STRIKE. THIS WAS DONE TO DISCREDIT UGTT LEADERS AND TO PROVIDE A RATIONALE FOR THE GOVERNMENT'S CURRENT "WAVE OF REPRESSION" WHICH, ACHOUR ALLEGED, IS DIRECTED PRIMARILY AT UGTT LOYALISTS. HE CHARGED THAT REPRESSIVE TACTICS, INCLUDING ARBITRARY ARRESTS, COERCION, AND PHYSICAL BEATINGS, EXPLAINED  
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THE AVALANCHE OF RESIGNATION TELEGRAMS, FROM BOTH UNION OFFICIALS AND MEMBERS, NOW FLOWING INTO THE GOVERNMENT.

2. HE CITED TWO, AND POSSIBLY THREE, CASES OF SOCIAL ABUSE

WHICH PRECEDED PUBLISHED RESIGNATION LETTERS: THOSE OF MOHAMED GUELBI, A JOURNALIST ON THE STAFF OF ECH-CHAAB, THE

UGTT WEEKLY, WHOM ACHOUR SAYS WAS BEATEN SEVERELY TO EXTRACT HIS RESIGNATION LETTER. ANOTHER CASE WAS THAT OF KHELIFA ABID, MEMBER OF THE UGTT EXECUTIVE BUREAU. ABID HAD BEEN HOSPITALIZED WITH A HEART AILMENT. ACHOUR SAYS HE WAS PRESSURED IN HIS HOSPITAL BED BY MEDICAL STAFF AND SECURITY AUTHORITIES TO SIGN A RESIGNATION LETTER. ACHOUR WAS UNSURE OF THE CASE OF MOKHTAR GHERISSI, ASSISTANT EDITOR AND CHIEF OF ECH-CHAAB, BUT HE WAS CONVINCED THAT GHERISSI'S RESIGNATION LETTER TOO WAS A PRODUCT OF COERCION.

3. ACHOUR DENIED THE EXISTENCE OF ANY ARMS CACHES EITHER IN UGTT HEADQUARTERS, TUNIS, OR IN UGTT REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS, SFAX. THE GOVERNMENT CLAIMS TO HAVE DISCOVERED CRUDE ARMS AND INCENDIARIES IN BOTH LOCATIONS.

4. IN SUBSEQUENT DISCUSSIONS, VARIOUS OTHER SOURCES (UNFORTUNATELY, MOST OF THEM INTERESTED PARTIES) TENDED TOWARD AGREEMENT WITH MAJOR ELEMENTS OF ACHOUR'S TALE: COERCED RESIGNATIONS, PSD INVOLVEMENT IN CIVIL DISORDERS, AND WIDESPREAD REPRESSION. THESE SOURCES PREDICTED INVARIABLY THAT MUCH MORE LABOR AND SOCIAL UNREST WOULD FOLLOW: SOME IN SOLIDARITY WITH ACHOUR AND HIS BOARD, MUCH OF IT IN PROTEST AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT. AT THIS WRITING WE ARE ATTEMPTING TO TRACK WIDESPREAD RUMORS OF A FOLLOW-ON GENERAL STRIKE AND/OR TRANSPORTATION STRIKE WHICH SUPPOSEDLY IS SCHEDULED TO BEGIN MIDNIGHT TONIGHT.

5. IRVING BROWN, AFL-CIO INTERNATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE, VISITED  
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TUNIS JAN 29 AND 30. HE CALLED UPON PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA TO OBTAIN HIS APPRECIATION OF RECENT EVENTS AND TO REQUEST PERMISSION TO SEE HABIB ACHOUR WHO NOW IS UNDER ARREST AND IN POLICE CUSTODY. NOUIRA LAID OUT THE FACTS OF THE CURRENT TUNISIAN DOMESTIC SITUATION AS HE SAW THEM, BUT HE REFUSED BROWN PERMISSION TO VISIT HABIB ACHOUR SAYING THAT HE HAD NO EXTRAORDINARY POWERS IN A "JUDICIAL MATTER." BROWN EXPLAINED TO THE PRIME MINISTER THAT THIS REFUSAL WOULD COMPEL INTERNATIONAL BODIES TO TAKE A POSITION CONTRARY TO THAT OF THE TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT, AND THAT IN SPITE OF BROWN'S BEST EFFORTS MAY WELL UNLEASH A SERIOUS PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN SUPPORTING ACHOUR AND ATTACKING THE GOVT. BROWN DID VISIT ACHOUR FAMILY MEMBERS, INCLUDING THAMEUR, FROM WHOM HE RECEIVED UGTT ALLEGATIONS SIMILAR TO THOSE REPORTED EARLIER. BROWN ALSO SAW A WIDE RANGE OF CONTACTS DURING HIS 48 HOURS IN TUNIS WHO, HE SAID, TENDED TO CONFIRM THE GENERAL UNPOPULARITY OF THE GOVERNMENT.

6. WE ARE NOT IN A POSITION TO EVALUATE THE VERACITY OF THE CLAIMS, CHARGES, AND COUNTER-CHARGES GROWING OUT OF "THURSDAY NIGHT", (AS THE LOCAL PRESS ALREADY IS CALLING THE DEBACLE OF THIS WEEKEND). THE OBJECTIVE FACTS ARE YET UNKNOWN-- AND PERHAPS UNKNOWABLE -- SURROUNDING CONTROVERSIES SUCH AS THE MOVEMENT

OF TRANSFORMATION FROM STRIKE TO RIOT, EXXACT INTERROGATION PRO-  
CEDURES, PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF UGTT "WEAPONS CACHES" AND  
PSD DIRECT INVOLVMENT IN THE TROUBLES. BUT WE FEEL THAT WIDELY-  
HELD PERCEPTIONS, HOWEVER ACCURATE OR INACCURATE THEY MAY BE,  
ARE IN THEMSELVES WORTH REPORTING.  
MULCAHY

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## Message Attributes

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**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
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**Decaption Date:** 01 jan 1960  
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**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
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**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** n/a  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** GS  
**Errors:** N/A  
**Expiration:**  
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**Review Markings:**  
Sheryl P. Walter  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
20 Mar 2014  
**Markings:** Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014